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ABSTRACT

In an assessment of middle school practitioners' attitudes concerning the possible use of school facilities for extended-day programs, 732 participants of a seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville were surveyed. A total of 472 participants returned the survey instrument. Participants were members of four- to six-person middle school teams consisting of an administrator, a counselor, and teachers. Participants were asked to respond to nine questions related to the possible use of public school facilities for extended-day programs. They were told that possibilities for programs included supervision from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., breakfast, recreational and educational activities, and dinner. Responses to the questions were consistently positive, but fell far short of total agreement. A majority of respondents felt that the basic idea was a good one, that parents would respond favorably, and that provision of services would benefit the community. Additional findings are briefly discussed. (RH)

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EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS FOR LATCHKEY CHILDREN

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Although the term "latchkey child" is common in all forms of journalism today, a brief introduction to the term may be helpful when considering implications for public schools.

In general, all children who must take care of themselves while their parent or guardian are not home are latchkey children. The term more specificially refers to those children who are alone during the time period between the end of school and until a parent returns home from work. There is no simple age limit which defines a latchkey child, and the assumption must be made that legal questions related to supervision may arise when any minor child enters their home and there is no parent present.

However, based on what is known about child development, the critical ages fall within the middle school years. Older adolescents may be seen as independent, and pre-school children categorically in need of supervision, but as in many social concepts, there will be no consensus about middle school children and the extent of supervision needed in the home. Also, there may never be consensus concerning the relative advantages and disadvantages of specific latchkey arrangements. There are enough negative concerns, however, to make extended day programs in public schools a frequently mentioned alternative.

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Fear of being alone is a frequently mentioned negative consequence of latchkey arrangements. When questioned, children mentioned the possibility of breakins, physical assault, fires and sibling conflicts as fears they have when alone. Excessive reliance on television is another negative consequence of latchkey arrangements. Homework assignments frequently suffer due to lack of supervision or due to total responsibility being placed on the child due to parent absence. These are all negative aspects of latchkey arrangements at home that could possibly be solved through extended day programs at school.

Despite the negatives associated with existing latchkey arrangements, extended day programs should carefully avoid losing any

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positive characteristics. For example, the independence that some children feel when allowed to care for themselves should be incorporated into extended day programs. Since most schools are highly structured, the extended day program should be less structured in order to provide an outlet for kids at the end of the school day. Extended day programs should not be a continuation of the existing curriculum.

Finally, if extended day programs are designed, they should focus on providing solutions to existing problems of latchkey arrangements, rather than creating additional ones.

SURVEY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRACTITIONERS

To assess current middle school practitioners' attitudes concerning the possible use of school facilities for extended day programs, 732 participants of the Teaching the Transescent Seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville were surveyed in August, 1990. Of the potential 732 participants in the Transescent Seminar, 472 returned a survey.

Seminar participants are members of a 4-6 person middle school team who attend the seminar to work on a self-selected project for school improvement. The team is comprised of an administrator, a counselor, and teachers from their school.

Participants were asked to respond to nine questions related to the possible use of public school facilities for extended day programs. They were told that possibilities for such programs could include providing 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. supervision, and such things as breakfast, recreational and educational activities, and dinner.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Item 1 "Is there a latchkey program operating in the school where you teach?"

Program	Yes	No
latchkey program now operating	20	452

Twenty of the respondents indicated that some extended hours of service were already provided by their school system. These respondents are not included in the major portion of the analysis. Of the 452 participants remaining, 331 were teachers, 50 were counselors, 50 were administrators, 16 indicated "other" school assignments, and five did not indicate an assignment.

Item 2 "Using the middle school where I teach as a latchkey facility would be a good idea."

Position	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Teachers	60%	22%	18%
Counselors	56%	22%	22%
Administrators	56%	32%	12%

Sixty percent of the teachers responding chose agree or strongly agree. Eighteen percent chose disagree or strongly disagree. Fifty-six percent of counselors chose an agreement category and twenty-two percent chose a disagree category. Administrators selected agreement categories fifty-six percent of the time and disagreement categories twelve percent of the time.

Item 3 "Parents in my school's community would respond favorably to using our middle school for latchkey student services."

Position	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Teachers	55%	36%	9%
Counselors	70%	24%	6%
Administrators	78%	18%	4%

Fifty-five percent of the teachers agreed and nine percent disagreed. Seventy percent of counselors agreed and six percent disagreed. Seventy-eight percent of administrators agreed and four percent disagreed.

Item 4 "If latchkey student services were provided by our school, the approximate percentage of middle school children who would participate in some way would be:"

Percent of children	<33%	33-50%	>50%
% of respondents	66%	28%	6%

Considering all respondents, sixty-six percent chose the category "less than 33 percent." Twenty-eight percent chose "33 percent to 50 percent." Six percent chose "more than 50 percent."

Item 5 "If latchkey services were provided by our school, only the following grade levels should be allowed to participate:"

Grade Level	Appropriate to participate
Fifth grade	57%
Sixth grade	81%
Seventh grade	74%
Eighth grade	62%
Ninth grade	16%

Since all or none of the grades could be selected, the data for each grade is independent of the other grades.

The fifth grade was included by fifty-seven percent.

The sixth grade was included by eighty-one percent.

The seventh grade was included by seventy-four percent.

The eighth grade was included by sixty-two percent.

Item 6. "If latchkey services were offered at our school, I would be willing to work part-time with students enrolled in such services."

Position	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Teachers	30%	29%	41%
Counselors	56%	20%	24%
Administrators	24%	32%	44%

Thirty percent of the teachers agreed, compared to fifty-six percent of the counselors. Twenty-four percent of the administrators agreed.

Item 7. "If latchkey services were offered at our school, my preference for administration of those services would be:"

Position	Existing school Administration	Existing community Agency	Other
Teachers	23%	55%	22%
Counselors	20%	68%	12%
Administrators	25%	55%	20%

There was little variation in responses to the choice of using "the existing school administration." Twenty-two percent of all respondents selected this possibility

Sixty-eight percent of the counselors chose an "existing comunity agency" to administrate a possible program. Fifty-five percent of teachers and fifty-five percent of the administrators also chose this option.

Twenty-one percent of all respondents chose the option "other."

Item 8. "If latchkey services were administered by a community agency created solely for providing those services, I would serve on the board of that agency."

Position	Yes	No
Teachers	24%	76%
Counselors	51%	49%
Administrators	64%	36%

Sixty-four percent of the administrators said "yes." Fifty-one percent of the counselors also would consider serving on a board of directors. Only twenty-four percent of teachers were interested.

Item 9. "Latchkey student services at our school would benefit the school's community."

Position	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Teachers	71%	21%	8%
Counselors	74%	24%	2%
Administrators	74%	16%	10%

Seventy-four percent of the administrators and counselors agreed, as did seventy-one percent of the teachers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Responses to the attitude questions were consistently positive, although far short of consensus. There will be support from teachers, counselors, and administrators for extended day services in schools AND there will be opposition. A majority of respondents felt the basic idea was a good one, that parents would respond favorably, and that providing services would benefit the community. However, if the "undecided" respondents happened to "disagree" at some point, one third of the respondents could be unhappy. Clearly, proposals for extended day services need to address the concerns of skeptics.

Interpretation of the responses to questions about willingness to work in a program or serve on a governing board should be made in terms of need rather than consensus. It is not likely that one fourth of the teachers in a school would need to serve on a board of directors. There will not be employment for thirty percent of the teachers. Apparently, there will be competition in both of these areas. Considering the number of teachers who "moonlight" in nonprofessional areas, extended day services may create attractive employment opportunities.

The number of students who may participate in extended day services was a difficult projection to make. Averages may mask differences in specific communities. Again, in terms of need the respondents indicated that there will be enough children participating to justify an organized program. Participation in extended day services may match or exceed many other optional activities provided by schools.

A majority of respondents included all of the traditional middle school grades as appropriate for extended day services. The ninth grade was included on the survey to establish the possibility of an upper limit. The drop from approximately sixty percent including fifth through eighth grade to only sixteen percent including the ninth grade suggests a natural upper limit.